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SUBJECT: NEW POLICE UNIT IN KOLKATA TO IMPROVE ENFORCEMENT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING LAWS

REF: NEW DELHI 6588

¶1. (U) Summary. On June 28, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in West Bengal launched the state's first Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) at its headquarters in Kolkata in a concerted effort to combat trafficking of persons in the state. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee inaugurated the center and urged senior police officials to place importance on anti-trafficking efforts. The creation of the AHTU is part of a program for police training and capacity-building undertaken by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in partnership with the GOI's Ministry of Home Affairs and is supported by USD 2.5 million in USG funding. A second AHTU in the state in Berhampore, near the border with Bangladesh, is to open in the next month. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Inaugurating the AHTU, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said that human trafficking is not just a law and order issue but that poverty, illiteracy and social backwardness are the root causes of this problem. West Bengal, sharing international borders with Nepal and Bangladesh, experiences intra- and inter-state trafficking as well as cross-border trafficking. Addressing a gathering of police, government officials and NGO representatives, Bhattacharjee said, "Trafficking is a global problem. It should not be considered a job of some officers in the unit. All senior officers should take this problem seriously." He also urged police officials to work in collaboration with various government departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as students, who could help raise awareness and campaign against trafficking. NGOs like Sanlaap have welcomed the initiative. Sanlaap Director Indrani Sinha told post that Sanlaap has already started working more closely with police officials and has even conducted joint training programs on anti-trafficking, and jointly worked on rescue operations of trafficked victims.

¶3. (U) Deputy Inspector General (Special) CID Sanjoy Mukherjee,

who is currently responsible for the Kolkata AHTU, said that it will include three inspectors and six sub-inspectors, who will be supervised by an officer with the rank of deputy superintendent of police. The work of the unit will include conducting raids, investigating crimes, arresting traffickers, rescuing trafficked victims and arranging for their rehabilitation with the aid of the state government and NGOs. For the AHTU in Kolkata, the UNODC has provided a vehicle, computer system, cell phones, grants for honorariums to NGOs, as well as funds for post-rescue care and attention of victims of trafficking. Mukherjee also said that a second AHTU will soon be set up in a month's time in Berhampore, Murshidabad district, about 250 kilometers north of Kolkata, near the Bangladesh border. The Kolkata unit will look into trafficking incidents reported from the southern parts of the state while the Berhampore unit will deal with those reported from the northern districts.

¶4. (U) UNODC Project Coordinator for Human Trafficking, P.M. Nair told post that the Chief Minister is very sensitive to the issue of trafficking in women and children and has assured him of his government's cooperation to deal with this menace. Nair said that he has suggested to the Chief Minister that the achievements of the Kolkata AHTU in the coming months in terms of cases registered, arrests made, and victims rescued and rehabilitated, could be held up as an example of how a special unit to tackle trafficking can make a difference. This practice can then be institutionalized and AHTUs be set up in every district of West Bengal with help of funds sought from the federal government's police modernization program.

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¶5. (SBU) The AHTU in Kolkata follows the creation of similar AHTUs in trafficking-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh and Goa. Nair said that the next state which is going to have an AHTU is Bihar. Following the formation of an AHTU in Andhra Pradesh three months back, 501 trafficked persons were rescued, including 91 children, and 697 traffickers were arrested. Nair also said that recently a trafficker was convicted in Andhra Pradesh, which is a rare occurrence in India given its cumbersome legal system.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The new AHTU in Kolkata reflects national and state efforts, with the support of US funding and UNODC expertise, to bring greater police focus on the problem of human trafficking. Police typically have not aggressively enforced anti-trafficking laws but the creation of this special unit represents a tangible step in combatting trafficking in persons in West Bengal.
JARDINE